

## **NBC Election Night Coverage**

**Congressman says GE's Welch spent two hours at NBC decision desk on election night  
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**Associated Press**

By David Bauder

General Electric Co. Chairman Jack Welch spent two hours in November on election night reviewing returns and distracting the NBC News executives responsible for NBC's presidential projections, a congressman charged on Monday.

Welch's election night activities - the subject of a simmering battle between the network and Rep. Henry Waxman, a California Democrat - boiled over in a lengthy letter from Waxman to NBC Chairman Bob Wright.

NBC is owned by GE - which, at about \$440 billion, is the world's largest company in terms of market value. Waxman said Welch's presence at the network was "grossly inappropriate" and violates the spirit of separation between corporate management and NBC's news division. Waxman has been trying for months to get a copy of company videotapes that may show Welch's activities that night. The network has refused to turn them over, saying it would be "highly inappropriate" to turn over material dealing with editorial decision-making. NBC's supporters have cited First Amendment protections preventing government interference with the media.

NBC has repeatedly denied that Welch's presence influenced the network's decision to call the election for George W. Bush early on the morning after Election Day. NBC rescinded that call before the election was finally decided more than a month later.

"In an eight-page tome, Congressman Waxman comes up with the shocking revelation that Jack Welch was interested in the results of what was perhaps the most riveting night in the history of presidential elections and that he supported George W. Bush," NBC spokesman Cory Shields said. "Not exactly a news flash."

Waxman cited multiple eyewitness sources in its account of Welch's activities on election night. Aide Phil Schiliro declined name the sources.

According to Waxman's account, Welch arrived at NBC's election decision desk after 11 p.m. and said to Sheldon Gawiser, NBC's elections chief, "how much would I have to pay you to call the race for Bush?" Waxman said the comment may have been made in jest.

Gawiser was repeatedly called upon to explain what he was doing as results came in. Waxman said the request "distracted" Gawiser.

"Efforts were reportedly made during this time period to escort Mr. Welch away from the decision desk," Waxman wrote. "These efforts did not succeed."

Immediately after Fox News Channel became the first network to call the election for Bush, Welch "was observed standing behind Dr. Gawiser with a hand on his shoulder, asking why NBC was not also calling the election for Bush," Waxman wrote.

Shields said NBC would not discuss Welch's specific activities that night. He said they were all irrelevant, considering NBC said Welch had nothing to do with NBC's decisions.

Waxman said he had no evidence that any of NBC's on-air personnel knew what Welch was doing or even if he was there.

He said that he "could not disagree more strongly that a congressional investigation jeopardizes the First Amendment. To the contrary, this is an instance where investigation may be necessary to preserve the independence of the media."

In an interview with The Associated Press before his retirement Friday, Welch said any suggestion he tried to influence journalists on election night is "crazy. Just pure crazy."

"The idea that I had anything to do with the election is on its face for people with IQs over 50 beyond belief," Welch said.

Welch said he was at NBC with GE clients as his guests on election night, continuing a tradition he started after GE bought NBC in 1986. GE's diverse operations include jet engines and medical equipment.

"It's one of the benefits of NBC, to bring a plastics customer or a medical customer or an aircraft engine customer in for an election night party," Welch said. "And we've been doing it for 15 years and no one's ever said a thing."

